those by Robert Stewart, rank as the very best of the era.

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A half Antwerp maiolica tile with an incomplete Flemish inscription excavated in London

Hans van Gangelen[1] and Frans Caignie[2]

Introduction

In October 2018, Frans Caignie received a photograph from Hans van Lemmen of a broken half of a maiolica tile found in London. It was found during excavations carried out by MOLA (Museum of London Archaeology) at the site of St Bartholomew's Hospital and depicts a putto within a circular border showing parts of a Flemish inscription (Fig. 1). The initial questions raised about

Figure 1. Remnant of a tile with a putto representation in a circle band and part of a motto. (© MOLA, inv. no. SBQ14-248, 134 x? x22 mm), (photo: Maggie Cox, Museum of London Archaeology)

this tile fragment were not so much about the tile itself, or the half figure of the putto depicted on it, but about the missing text and how the inscription showing the letters 'IN • DVECHDE ….. EL • could be completed. Despite some initial research, this question could not be solved. However, there were new developments in early 2023 when Hans van Gangelen, the co-author of this article, came onto the scene. He had experience of studying images on tiles linked to old inscriptions and he was therefore immediately willing to help search for the missing text on the putto tile.[3] In this way, a collaboration between the two authors came about, resulting in the present article in which not only the incomplete inscription but also various other aspects of the tile fragment are analysed in depth.

When seeing the fragment for the first time, several questions immediately arose. What did the whole original tile look like? Would it be possible to read the whole inscription and if so, what was its meaning? Is this a floor tile or a wall tile? Where was it made and when? To all these questions, this article attempts to provide answers based on a reasoned hypothesis.

The Putto

The figure of the putto is drawn with a fine blue outline and the blue shading makes the figure lie, as it were, on top of the tile surface. It is the figure of a chubby boy, and putti are often depicted in this way. With his right arm raised, he just touches the circular border with a rather claw-like hand. The left arm swings behind him, suggesting that we are dealing with a dancing putto, which is how they are often represented. This can be verified when we compare the London fragment with a slightly smaller tile in the Museum Mayer van den Bergh in Antwerp (Fig. 2). The image of the putto on the London fragment

Figure 2. Tile depicting a dancing putto: Museum Mayer van den Bergh, Antwerp, inv. no. MMB.0690, 105 x 106 x 21 mm, (photo: Bart Huysmans)

Figure 3. Playing putti, details from the tile panel ***'The conversion of Saul on the way to Damascus'.*** **Above: cut-out from the top edge of the panel, tiles 2 to 6. Below: cut-out from the lower edge of the panel, tiles 93 to 97. MAS - Museum aan de Stroom, Antwerp, (photo: Bart Huysmans)**

is preserved to about hip height leaving us to guess about the missing parts – the boy's lower torso and legs – which would probably connect close to the lower edge of the circular border and possibly standing on a green (grass) area. A striking detail of many putto representations on tiles is their brightly coloured hair, painted in brown or yellow. Compare this with the tile in Figure 2 which is of the *Herkenrode* type.[4]

The circular border and corner motif

The circular border is composed of two narrow white strips and a wide yellow band with brown dots which can be compared with those on the circular border of Figure 2. The full dark-blue corners of the putto tile fragment are unique within the range of known corner motifs on Antwerp maiolica tiles. With the exception of tiles from tile panels, single tiles usually have stylised ornament in their corners such as a palmette, quarter-rosette or quarter-star reserved in white on a blue background.

Material characteristics

Measuring 134 mm wide, the London tile also presumably had a height of 134 mm. The thickness of 21 to 22 mm is constant across the entire surface while the edges are tapered which is normally a property of wall tiles. However, the missing strip of glaze at the top edge of the tile looks like running wear and indicates that the tile has been used on the floor. Classified as being a 'MOLA fabric type 3086',[5] the tile body is hard and fine without any noticeable intrusions on the fractured edge. The body is cream along the bottom edge while the remainder is pink and no nail holes are visible. There are three small glaze spots on the edges, one white and two blue-and-white.[6]

Dating

Two elements in the design can be used to provide a clue: the full-blue corners and the putto. During an archaeological survey in the Bishop's Palace at the Schoenmarkt in Antwerp, archaeologists found 51 maiolica tiles and fragments of tiles in a layer of rubble under the building bearing ornamental and figurative images within a circular border with full-blue corners. Until 1559, this building was a House of Refuge of the Cistercian Abbey of Hemiksem, located on the Scheldt River about 15 km outside the city. All the images are set within in a circular border in various designs, including one filled with dots as on the London putto tile. On other tiles, the dots are strung together to form a rope design, while some borders are just painted monochrome yellow. The ornamental images show rosettes and stars in various designs, while the figurative images include birds and animals, and even a warrior.[7]

Nine other tiles found on this site are probably the remains of three tile panels that can be linked to the abbey at Hemiksem and Jacobus van der Meeren, who was the abbot from 1536 to 1559. This immediately gives us a date for the production of this tile series as well as for the London specimen.[8] One half-tile containing elements of the abbot's coat of arms must have formed part of a small tile panel, to take an analogy from the other two tile panels, each of which comprise nine tiles.[9] The images on the two other incomplete tile panels, one with a cruxification and one with the coat of arms of Hemiksem Abbey, are set in the same type of laurel wreath and have the same corner motif with a Renaissance vase as tiles excavated in a house at Farm Place, Bletchingley, Surrey.[10] Based on its similarity to the tiles purchased by abbot Jacobus van der Meeren, the production of the putto tile can be placed between 1536 and 1559, a span of barely 23 years. Only years later, in 1567, the Antwerp maiolica potters Jasper Andries and Jacob Janssen settled in Norwich 'where they followed their trade, making Galley Paving Tiles and Vessels for Apothecaries and ...'.[11]

Use of the putto image as an aid to dating the tile was prompted by the fact that putti on tiles occur mainly in the second quarter of the 16th century. The tile of Figure 2 is identical in composition to those made in 1532/33 for the high choir of the Cistercian abbey of Herkenrode. Whether it formed part of this floor, which was removed from the church in 1888, cannot be ascertained. The specimen in the Museum Mayer van den Bergh was purchased by Fritz Mayer van den Bergh from an Antwerp antique dealer in 1896.[12] A tile panel depicting 'The Conversion of Saul on the way to Damascus', dated 1547, has a frieze of tiles at its top and bottom bearing groups of putti at play (Fig. 3).[13] The date of production of all these tiles depicting putti is therefore securely placed in the second quarter of the 16th century.

Place of production

In addition to the 51 tiles with dark blue corners found in the Bishop's Palace at the Schoenmarkt in Antwerp, another specimen with these characteristics was found during the excavation in St Augustine's church in the Kammenstraat in Antwerp (Fig. 4, left).[14] Moreover, the depiction of a daisy flower in a circular band with blue dots is identical to the depiction on a tile from the Bishop's Palace (Fig. 4, right). In 2004, an emergency archaeological survey was carried in the church as part of the construction of an underground climate management system. In the floor foundation infill inside the church, a large quantity of maiolica pottery waste material was found, presumably brought in from maiolica potters working in the surrounding area. Moreover, the church is located diagonally opposite the present house number 34 where Guido Andries' maiolica workshop *Den Salm* was located in the 16th century.[15] Guido Andries died before November 1541. If the tiles with blue corners, including the London putto tile, were made in the Den Salm workshop, production under Guido Andries's direction seems unlikely, given that abbot Jacobus van der Meeren only took charge of Hemiksem Abbey in 1536. The manufacture of these tiles may therefore be after 1541 when the workshop was run by Franchois Frans, who married Guido's widow, Anna van Dueren, in December 1543, and to whom the 'Conversion of Saul' tile picture is attributed. The attribution to the Den Salm workshop must remain hypothetical owing to the fact that there were several other maiolica producers active in the area around the Kammenstraat at the time.

Figure 4. Tiles with a daisy flower in a circle band and full-blue corners. Left: from an excavation at St Augustine's church, City of Antwerp archaeology department, A234/1/T56, 142 x 93 x 20 mm, (photo: Frans Caignie). Right: excavated from the Bishop's Palace. City of Antwerp archaeology department, A102/0/M10, 144 x 93 x 21 mm, (photo: Frans Caignie)

Provenance

The putto tile discovered at the site of St Bartholomew's Hospital in London seems to have been an isolated find that cannot be further assigned to any specific dwelling or building in London.[16] It may have been part of a floor whose remaining tiles have not yet seen the light of day. In London, many more 'loose tiles' have been found that now belong to the Museum of London's collection. An inventory with images of tiles excavated in London was published in 2010, so the discovery of the Antwerp putto tile in London is not an isolated case.[17] There are known instances of tile exports from Antwerp to England in the 16th century. The earliest example are the floor tiles from c. 1520 in the manor house The Vyne, Hampshire, of Lord William Sandys.[18] A fireplace tiled with the remains of a tile panel, including a base tile dated 1546, was found in a house at Firle, near Lewes, East Sussex.[19] Recently, the previously mentioned study (see reference[10]) of floor tiles in the Tudor manor house at Place Farm in Blenchingly indicates, according to NAA/ICP research, that these were Antwerp products.[20]

The inscription

An important feature of the tile fragment is the circular inscription surrounding the figure of the putto. The principal reason for writing this article is, after all, to find the missing words and letters and explain their meaning. The preserved part of the inscription reads: 'IN • DVECHDE ..... EL •', painted in capital letters with a dot between the separate words. It soon became clear that the first two words of the incomplete Flemish inscription read 'IN •DVECHDEN •' and the last word as 'ADEL • ', 'EDEL • ' or 'EEDEL • '.[21]

We have already established that the tile under discussion was made between 1536 and 1559. Since the presumption of both authors was that the complete inscription would probably relate to a common Flemish proverb or motto from that period, the first step was to search in books with proverbs from the mid-16th century. Prior to this, however, an important publication about Dutch proverbs by the nineteenth century Dutch language scholar P. J. Harrebomée[22] was studied to commence the process and this yielded the proverb 'Deugd alleen maakt waren adel' (Only virtue leads to true nobility), with a reference to the oldest source found with this proverb in a book published by Peter Warnersen at Kampen in 1550, entitled *Gemeene Duitsche Spreckwoorden: Adagia oft Proverbia ghenoemt.*[23] Two more proverbs from Harrebomée's book that have more or less the same substantive meaning read: 'De adel der ziel is meer waardig, dan de adel des geslachts' (A noble mind is worth more than nobility by birth) and 'Die aâldom door zijn deugd verwerft, Passeert hem, die ze heeft geërfd' (Nobility acquired by virtue is worth more than nobility by birth), both without further source reference.[24]

Further study of Warnersen then yielded two more proverbs: 'Nyemant Eedel / sonder deuchde' (Nobody is noble without virtue) and 'Duechde maeckt Eedel' (Virtue makes noble).[25] Warnersen indicates in a footnote that both were taken from proverbs by the German humanist scholar Johann Agricola (1494-1566), published by him in his *Gemeiner Sprichwörter* from 1529-1530 and 1544, respectively. Additionally, the following proverbs are included: 'Niemant edel on [ohne] tugent' (Nobody is noble without virtue) and 'Tugent macht adel / Edel geboren sein macht nich tugent' (Virtue makes noble / nobility obtained by birth does not make a virtuous person). We also hoped to find a clue in the book *Seer schoone spreeckwoorden / oft proverbia* by Hans de Laet, published in Antwerp in 1549, but this yielded no result.[26]

The above proverbs, 'Duechde maeckt Eedel' (by Warnersen) and the corresponding 'Tugent macht adel' (by Agricola), may have been derived from the Latin proverbs 'Virtus nobilitat' (Virtue nobles), and 'Sola nobilitat virtus' (Only virtue nobles) respectively taken from the virtue ethics of the Greek philosopher, Aristotle.[27] Famous in the 16th century were the many reprints of Erasmus's *Adagia*, a compilation by him of thousands of Greek and Latin proverbs from classical antiquity. Whether the above proverbs were included could not be ascertained, but what is certain is that this theme was not unknown to Erasmus. Thus, in a 1952 Dutch translation of his book *Stultitae laus* (Praise of Folly), 1514 edition, we read: '… hij voorts [die] een derden, die op zijn stamboom stoft, een gemeenen bastaard noemt, omdat er een wijde klove gaapt tusschen hem en de deugd, de eenige bron van adel, …' (he, who calls another person who boasts of his pedigree a mean bastard because there is a wide gap between him and virtue, this being the only source of nobility).[28] It should be noted that by the 16th century, a contradiction had grown between the acquired 'nobility by birth' and the acquired 'nobility by virtue'. In Antwerp, the city of trade and commerce, many urban patricians put themselves in into the latter category of 'nobility'.[29]

According to the author, Mark Meadow, no standard form of any proverb existed in the mid-16th century.[30] We must therefore look beyond the books of proverbs. For instance, a brief exploration of mid-16th century Dutch song lyrics yielded the following repetitive refrain: 'Wy moghen wel loven en dancken den Heer, Vrolijck wesen in duechden, in eer' (We may praise and thank the Lord, be merry in virtue and honour).[31] This is part of the song 'Dese nijders met haer quaet fenijn Int walsce Je mon coeur (Ps. CXVII)' ('These envious people with their vicious tongues', to the tune of 'je my mon coeur', Psalm 117), which in turn is from the songbook *Souterliedekens*, printed in 1540 in Antwerp by Symon Cock. This songbook does not mention its author, but it is generally assumed to be the Utrecht nobleman jonkheer Willem van Zuylen van Nyevelt (?? - c. 1563)

Although the *Souterliedekens* songbook is about Catholic psalm arrangements, they are not specifically *Romanesque* in nature but concealed after a reformatory model.[32] The distribution of this songbook proved to be a bestseller; nine editions appeared in the first year alone (1540). This was not only due to the fact that besides the song texts, the melodies were included in notation, but also to the Reformation-oriented content of the texts. The songs were mainly sung in the domestic circle, but it is also known that *Souterliedekens* played a role for a short time - between 1550 and 1553 - in the church services of the Dutch refugee church in London. The contents of the said songbook were almost entirely reproduced in a psalm book published by the 'Nederduytsche ghemeynte' in 1551.[33]

An example of a 16th century book text containing the combination of the words 'duechden' (virtue) and 'edel' (noble) was further found in *Die grote evangelische Peerle* printed in Antwerp by Henrick Peetersen van Middelburgh in 1537/38. The unknown author was a devout virgin inspired by Modern Devotion. In the prologue, Father Dirk Loer, vicar of the Carthusians in Cologne, describes her as 'een notabel verlicht mensche, nyet alleen van geslachte, mer veel meer van duechden edel' (a venerable enlightened person, not only of good birth, but even more noble in virtues).[34]

Conclusion

Based on comparative tile research and related archival material, the production of the putto tile can be placed between 1536 and 1559. Attribution to the maiolica workshop Den Salm from the Kammenstraat in Antwerp is purely hypothetical owing to the fact that several maiolica workshops were also active in that area in that period. Given the similarity of the full-blue painted tile corners with those on the tiles from the sites of the Bishop's Palace and St Augustine's Church (the only known tiles with that typical corner decoration), its production by an Antwerp maiolica workshop from the Kammenstraat or surrounding area is a distinct possibility.

Figure 5. Artist's impression of what the full putto tile might have looked like. Top half: (photo: Maggie Cox, Museum of London Archaeology). Lower half: colour pencil drawing by Hans van Gangelen, Groningen, (©Hans van Gangelen)

As for the reconstruction of the full inscription on the putto tile, we can conclude that it most probably was: 'IN • DVECHDEN • EEDEL • ' or 'IN • DVECHDEN • EDEL • ' This is consistent with the research of contemporary literary sources, but also with the fact that there was not much room on the tile for a longer inscription. The reconstructed lower part of the torso including the putto's legs takes up much of the lower half of the circular frame, and it is possible that the putto was dancing on a green area of grass (cf. Fig. 2) placing the figure in the open air (Fig. 5). Besides the ethical-moralistic nature of the inscription, the dancing putto refers precisely to light-hearted gaiety. This corresponds perfectly to Willem van Zuylen van Nyevelt's song lyrics: 'Wy moghen wel loven en dancken den Heer, Vrolijck wesen in duechden, in eer' (We may praise and thank the Lord, be merry in virtue and honour). Honour has long been one of the noble virtues of chivalry. However, while the above conclusion has a great deal of merit, it is also possible that the reconstructed short inscription on the maiolica floor tile under

investigation might simply be the personal motto of a Dutch patron living in London.

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